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CC:
Subject: FYI

Drinking Water
EPA Completes Testing of Wells Near
Pennsylvania Drilling Sites, Finds Water Safe

By Lorraine McCarthy

PHILADELPHIA—The Environmental Protection Agency has completed its sampling of private drinking water wells near Dimock, the Pennsylvania town where groundwater contamination was linked to natural gas drilling in 2009, and has determined that contaminant levels do not require additional action, an agency official said July 25.

“Our goal was to provide the Dimock community with complete and reliable information about the presence of contaminants in their drinking water and to determine whether further action was warranted to protect public health,” EPA Region 3 Administrator Shawn M. Garvin said in a statement. “The sampling and an evaluation of the particular circumstances at each home did not indicate levels of contaminants that would give EPA reason to take further action.”

The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) in 2009 held Houston-based Cabot Oil & Gas Corp. responsible for high methane levels in some private water wells in Dimock Township, finding that faulty casing and cement in natural gas wells the company had drilled in the area had allowed methane to migrate to groundwater.

Under terms of a 2010 settlement with the state, Cabot supplied water to 19 households until Nov. 30, 2011, when the DEP determined that the company had satisfied the conditions of the settlement and allowed Cabot to end the water deliveries.

EPA Intervention Sought

Some Dimock residents maintained their water was unfit to drink and asked EPA to get involved, which the agency agreed to do after receiving data from homeowners that left open the possibility of gaps in water sampling and sample results.

Despite criticism from the DEP and Cabot, which accused EPA of disregarding the state's technical expertise and extensive data collection efforts, EPA collected well-water samples from 64 Dimock-area

homes in January and February and released its findings over the course of the next five months.

Overall results of the sampling in Dimock showed well water at five homes contained levels of arsenic, barium, or manganese that could present a health concern, according to EPA, which noted that all three substances occur naturally.

“In all cases the residents have now or will have their own treatment systems that can reduce concentrations of those hazardous substances to acceptable levels at the tap,” EPA said. The agency said it has provided residents with all of their sampling results and has “no further plans to conduct additional drinking water sampling in Dimock.”

EPA said it will disconnect alternate water sources it had provided temporarily for four wells as a precaution in response to prior data indicating the water contained contaminants at levels that posed a health concern.

Contaminants Unrelated to Gas Development

In a statement issued in response to EPA's announcement, Cabot said the EPA findings “are consistent with thousands of pages of water quality data previously accumulated by state and local authorities and by Cabot Oil and Gas. As with the other findings, EPA did not indicate that those contaminants that were detected bore any relationship to oil and gas development in the Dimock area.”

Cabot said its natural gas development operations in Dimock “have led to significant economic growth in the area, marked by a collaborative relationship with the local community” and pledged its continued cooperation with federal, state, and local officials in using “the best and most accurate science to address public concerns.”

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